

Testing the Work Test

Amendments to the work test for unemployment benefits are being advocated by the Brotherhood.

We are proposing that the Social Services Act be amended for at least two years to make registration for employment with the CES the only basis of assessing willingness to work. This change then should be monitored for at least two years to assess administrative, economic and social effects.

This new policy has arisen out of our concern that the present administration of unemployment benefits, particularly the use of the work test, forces people into unsatisfactory and unsuitable jobs and holds them there. Government attempts to apply a more restrictive work test also encourage a 'blame the victim' view of the unemployed and diverts attention from the real issue — the shortage of jobs.

The purpose of the work test is primarily to ensure that unemployment benefit is not paid to persons who either do not actively seek work or who decline to accept suitable employment offered to them.

We believe that people want to work and that if jobs under reasonable conditions are available people will take them. Reasonable conditions include location of jobs and their suitability for the particular worker.

The most recent Federal Government inquiry into unemployment benefit and administration (the Myers Inquiry) stated that 'routine application of the work test serves very little purpose and is administratively objectionable'.

Among the reasons offered by the Myers Inquiry for its opposition to the routine administration of the work test were that —

- the test cannot be applied effectively where the number of job seekers greatly exceeds the number of jobs;
- the application of the test as a deterrent to those unwilling to work is objectionable to genuine job seekers; and
- if the work test succeeds in its objective of encouraging the reluctant workers into the workforce, unless an additional job is created, the consequence is

New Jobs for Ned

"We have heard and seen and read enough about the problems of unemployment during the past three or four years, until I suppose most people have come to regard them as a sort of evil that is always likely to be with us." No, that was not written recently. Those words were written, not in 1979, but by Father Tucker in 1935 in an article in 'The Herald' describing the Brotherhood's Plan for the Unem-



that another worker is displaced from the workforce and becomes eligible for benefit. Thus, there is no saving in cost to the community and presumably a willing worker is replaced by a reluctant one.

The Brotherhood believes that the arguments against the work test outlined by Dr Myers can be well supported but that it is more difficult to support his contention that the work test should be retained in a modified form because of fear of abuse. The difficulty is due to the real lack of evidence about abuse of the unemployment benefit system.

We are therefore proposing that the assumptions about abuse should be tested. The experiment would accord with our view that Governments should be prepared to undertake social experiments to test out trends and anticipate changes in community attitudes about matters as basic to the fabric of society as the work ethic.

ployed. Now 45 years later, the wheel of time has turned full circle with the launching of another plan for the unemployed, the Neighbourhood Employment Development Program. Designed by the Brotherhood as a local job creation program, it has been approved for funding by the Victorian Government and will be implemented jointly by the Brotherhood and the Victorian Employment Committee.

This program is based on some important concepts including the creation of jobs for those most disadvantaged by unemployment, and the integration of the efforts of local communities to combat unemployment. New permanent jobs will be provided in the human services and in small business enterprises. NED will set out to increase the total number of jobs without displacing or replacing existing workers.

The two municipalities of Box Hill and Williamstown have been selected as appropriate areas for this experimental program. Both areas are pleased to take part and will be provided with a job development officer who, with the assistance of a local advisory committee, will identify the needs of each particular area and devise new jobs to fill them. This worker will work for the Commonwealth Employment Service to select unemployed people for the new jobs and request training programs to equip trainees to fill them. The most difficult task will be to find ways in which the newly created jobs can be retained.

With the assistance of a representative from both localities the two workers have now been chosen, local committees have been set up, and the program is about to start. Overall evaluation of the program will be carried out by the Brotherhood. Further details are contained in a booklet available from either the Brotherhood or the Victorian Employment Committee.

Christmas Cards

The Combined Christmas Card Shop will be open until December 20 at Royston House, 270 Flinders Lane. Brotherhood cards are available from the shop and from 67 Brunswick Street, Fitzroy.